

Freeing the Captives



Isaiah 61:1-3

TITLE

We're returning to our journey through the boards that have been hanging here for a few months. Today we are going to have a look at the indigo boards – how we should be Jesus to those who are in the depth of problems, mourning, depressed, suffering, sick, suffering from addiction. **DEPRESSED PERSON** It's quite topical in many ways as I know of many in the church and associated with it that are struggling or have been with these kinds of problems. All of these things can dominate our lives can't they? They lock us down and chain us up.

But God doesn't want us to be chained down by our fears, depressions, sicknesses, grieving. He wants us to walk in the freedom that is already a reality for those who trust and follow Jesus. Jesus has come to break those bonds.

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The passage we read in Isaiah this morning is an important one in the Bible. Isaiah as you probably know is a prophetic book. Prophetic books were written by people whom God had moved to speak His word to His people at a particular time. But many prophetic words in the Bible don't only apply to that time, but apply to things in the future. **VALLEYS** It can be compared with looking at a scene like this. You look at a mountain scene and you can see the mountains and they look like a huge mass in front of you. But look more carefully and you can see at least three ranges with a couple of valleys between them. Prophecy's like that. **NOW AND NOT YET** It all looks as though it is referring to one thing, but often other passages of Scripture and fulfilment of prophecy shows us that a prophecy has a now and not yet aspect to it.

NOW

So what was for then in Isaiah 61? It was written to a nation that was broken and in economic ruin, the senior people taken into prison, the cream of society deported, the poor left to fend for themselves. And the prophet was anointed by God to bring a message of good news to the poor, the broken-hearted, the captives, the mourners that God's favour was to rest on them. And that proved to be so – literally.

JUBILEE

The whole idea of Isaiah was based on the concept of Jubilee. The Law given to the people provided for a time, once every 50 years, the year of Jubilee when all slaves would become free, and all land would be returned to its lawful owner. Leviticus 25: 8 "Count off seven Sabbaths of years--seven times seven years--so that the seven Sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years. 9 Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. 10 Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan.

A fundamental part of the law was that no person could ever be permanently a slave and that the land the people were allotted upon the conquest of Israel was their family's in perpetuity, so that land could only be leased to another owner rather than sold outright. Everything reverted in the Jubilee year. Great idea, but we don't know how much it was actually practised.

Jubilee has passed into our society and our monarch celebrates her Diamond Jubilee next year. All we get is an extra day off!

So here was the nation, dispossessed, captives. But a jubilee was promised them. And it came. Within 70 years, the prisoners were released, the captives were allowed to return to Jerusalem, those left in poverty had lands restored and generally they rejoiced because they found the favour of the Lord.

So it was a message for then. Yes, but it was a not yet message too. One thing was apparent from the latter part of Isaiah, and that was that the Jews were going to enjoy a time of independence, prosperity and become a light to the Gentiles and that clearly didn't happen in the centuries after the prophecy. They saw God's favour, but they were never independent as a nation again until 1947, and they certainly haven't seen

the day of vengeance of our God yet. They began to see it had a NOT YET aspect to this – one that spoke of a coming one – a Messiah who would restore Israel and wreak his vengeance on the earth.

Where it's really relevant to us is because Jesus applied this passage to Himself - because He is the Messiah. It both identified Him as Messiah and told us a bit of what Messiah was going to do. Let me read the verses for you from LUKE 4:14-21.

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. 16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, 21 and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Nazareth was the synagogue in which He was brought up. The people were initially impressed until they realised the implication of what He was saying; that He was the Messiah and was criticising their hardness of heart – then they wanted to kill Him.

VERSE

What I want to focus on are those words that Jesus applied to Himself: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

The Jews saw the Messiah as the one that would literally restore Israel. But here we find Jesus presenting Messiahship in a different way. Jesus didn't turn out to be the Messiah they they'd expected. He wasn't the conqueror they'd wanted. Take another look at the verses I just read. We've read Isaiah 61 and Luke 4 this morning and you'll notice the difference in Isaiah 61 – Jesus closed the scroll half-way through. Here's the rest: *and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all those who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion etc.* Why the stop? PICTURE Remember the picture? It had two ranges in the distance. Jesus showed that this prophecy was divided into another now and not yet. Now as the day of God's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God was to come.

[Actually there are other subtle differences between Isaiah 61 and Luke 4 but I'm not going to explore these this morning.]

If you don't know Jesus this morning, the implication of what He said is both bad news and good news for you. The bad news is that there is going to be a time coming when Jesus is going to catch up with you if you've chosen to ignore Him and continue to do so. That's the day of vengeance of our God. You will be accountable to Him. The good news is that this is the day of God's favour. Jesus came to show God's favour for each man and woman when He demonstrated His love for us by dying on the cross for us, that we may find the forgiveness, friendship and favour of God. Each of us need to realise that we have a decision to make – to recognise God's favour and accept Him and come into a living relationship with Jesus. Or of course we can reject it – in which case this prophecy has a warning for us – God will catch up with us – there is no escape.

But the question I want to answer to close is how the prophecy applies in the now beyond what I've just said. The Jews expected a Messiah that would literally fulfil the prophecy. Is this prophecy to be seen in a PHYSICAL OR SPIRITUAL sense?

The thrust of this series has been that as His church, we are Jesus' hands and feet for the 21st Century, so what applied to Him applied to us. How did Jesus preach good news to the poor proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour? Jesus brought these to people both physically and spiritually. He healed the sick, drove out demons, preached the kingdom.

It's all about bringing Jubilee. I was interested in David Cameron's frequent use of the words "broken society" to describe modern Britain and the storm that has caused. God goes further with the human race: we are a broken race like the citizens of Judah who were taken into captivity in Babylon. Dispossessed,

suffering, broken in spirit, captives. I'm not at all surprised that we have seen all the problems the nation has experienced in the last week. Look down human history and we'll see much the same. A broken race.

But the Spirit of the Lord anointed Jesus to bring jubilee to the human race. When Jesus died on the cross, he opened a way by which the human race could realise all the things God wanted for it. Jesus is good news for the poor, the blind, the broken-hearted, the captives.

But as we find with jubilee in the OT, it only worked when people decided to declare jubilee and act upon it. People could only be free people who benefited from their inheritance if they decided to act on it. Last Sunday we looked at a verse from 2 Corinthians 6 which said "Now is the acceptable time, now is the Day of Salvation". The time of jubilee is here, in Jesus, God is prepared to wipe out our debts, free us from captivity, give us our inheritance, make us citizens of heaven – but only if we are prepared to accept that personally.

Jesus brought it, we have to accept it, and when we have, we are as Jesus to others by bringing good news to the poor, making the blind see, binding up broken people, freeing the captives.

It's the most powerful message in the world. Its good news for everyone, but particularly to the poor and marginalised. As we discovered last week, Jesus dealt equally with the poor as with the rich which went against all of society's norms then. That was good news to the poor who were marginalised. The message of the Gospel is that **all** have sinned and come short of God's glory, but also that they are justified freely by His grace. All of God's people have that expectation of eternal sonship – as equals, not as poor or rich, men or women, Jews or Gentiles.

That's the spiritual aspect. You can't believe how powerful that is. It is an important principle that God's people have brought to our society over hundreds of years. God's people still remain in the vanguard of helping the most marginalised in our society and in our world, not just by speaking the words, but like Jesus, showing that we value them in practical ways.

In some societies Christianity is dangerous because it places equal worth on people and teaches us of our value to God in Christ. In India there has been a massive turning to Christ by the Dalit people, the Untouchables, the lowest and most worthless strata in Hindu society. Why? Because in Christ worthless people realise how precious they are to God. Jesus gives people real value.

But it goes beyond the poor, we bring sight to the blind, we bind up the broken-hearted and release the captives. Christians have been at the vanguard of doing all these things literally for centuries. That's our call and our role to be like Jesus. Let's never tire of it.

One of the biggest problems for Christians has been that so often we are unable to minister to others, or to do it effectively because we are captives ourselves in some way or another. Jesus died to make us free people and we are inheritors of all God's blessings. We should not be captives but as I said at the beginning many of God's people end up back in captivity again: problems, mourning, depressed, suffering, sick, suffering from addiction. This often means that we can't effectively be Jesus to others.

Jesus wants us to walk as free people so we can be the instruments to bring jubilee into the lives of other people. How do we walk free? Well, actually we are free already, we just need to claim it in Christ.

Jesus wants to make that difference in our lives this morning. He wants to throw our chains aside this morning allow Him deal with those issues and make a difference to them.

- healing – how is it going to come?
- relief from mourning, despair, difficulties of life
- addictions – bring freedom in God's strength.

All these our down-payments to what is really going to come when we finally enter His eternal presence. Be thankful for them and share what God has blessed you with amongst others that they may too find jubilee!

Find jubilee this morning – live a jubilee life!